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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by KATHLEEN BLISS

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NEWS-LETTER

EVANGELICAL ACADEMIES

LAMBETH AND THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION: TWO COMMENTS

CANON A. R. VIDLER

SUPPLEMENT

"IN THIS FAITH WE LIVE"
A FURTHER COMMENT
BY
WOODROW WYATT

THE EDITOR has been spending a week in Germany attending a Conference of journalists held under the chairmanship of Dr. Hans Lilje, Bishop of Hanover. Both the setting and the content of the Conference are an example of the way in which similar ideas begin to stir in different parts of the world without any obvious causal connection between them. In many different places, with varying degrees of success, the Churches are trying to reach out to the world by taking more seriously the professional and workaday activities of men and women as a field to which the Gospel must be made relevant. German Protestantism has not in the past been characterized by a strong sense of responsibility for the ordering of the life of society. Now, however, there is a real attempt at a new beginning in the post-war establishment of what are known as *Evangelical Academies*, each under the direction and control of the provincial bishop, in all four of the zones. The oldest is that at Bad Boll in the American zone, which was founded by Bishop Wurm in 1945. There are three others of these academies in the American zone, three in the British zone, one in the French, and one in the Russian. Two others in the Russian zone and a fourth in the British zone are being planned.

The name chosen may drop a little coldly on British ears. These places are not academies in the sense of being schools

or colleges: they are much more like conference centres, and the purpose is to bring together in them groups of theologians and Church leaders and men and women from a particular profession or calling. In the past three years in the different centres there have been conferences of doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, farmers, journalists, writers, Government employees, lawyers and industrial workers. It is estimated that last year fourteen thousand men and women took part in these conferences. The academies belong to an Association of Evangelical Academies throughout Germany, which publishes the more significant findings in a professional journal called *The Research Series of the Evangelical Academies*, edited by Professor Thielicke. There is also a more popular magazine called *The Furrow* which is associated with the same work.

In the British zone the best known of the academies is that at Hermannsburg in the diocese of Hanover. Hermannsburg is a village with an unusually interesting religious history. A hundred years ago a great religious revival took place there affecting in particular the hard-headed and wealthy farming community. The results of that revival are still to be seen in the well filled churches, the excellent Christian High School and the buildings of the Hermannsburg Mission. The last was founded by the gifts of converts a hundred years ago, and to this day it sends out missionaries to remote parts of the world, chiefly to minister to scattered German communities at the far ends of the earth. When the local inn fell vacant after the war it was rented by the diocese of Hanover and turned into an evangelical academy, capable of housing fifty or sixty people and providing an assembly hall for about a hundred.

As a part of the same forward movement the diocese has also established at Hermannsburg, working closely with the Academy but not as a necessary part of it, a Research Institute, the aim of which is to collect factual material of value to the Church, on a number of subjects. For example, a woman with first-rate qualifications in political economy and psychology, who has been engaged for a number of years in the making of social surveys, is occupied full time

in collecting material from secular and religious sources about refugees; another equally well qualified person provides the Church with data on education. The full value of this research has yet to be proved in the use that is made of it, and as money becomes available it will be enlarged.

It is not possible here to give a detailed account of the different courses which have been held at Hermannsburg. They obviously vary in numbers and quality, and the staff is constantly seeking to improve them by finding speakers and leaders and by making a large number of contacts to increase the range of people brought in. Those who attend the conferences are by no means all Christians, but from non-Christians as well as Christians there is a ready response to invitations. During the Nazi régime it was very difficult to break through the restraint on utterance which every man felt, and there is, therefore, a desire to communicate and discuss. The Church, when it has a place and the means of organizing such meetings, is certain of a ready response. But having collected the people together at a course, some Christians, some not, some old, some young, what should the Church try to do and say? There are, in fact, too many things to be said and done. A prime mover in one of the Evangelical Academies said in a group at Amsterdam, "Our teaching has to begin from the real questions of our time and not with questions of the past: not, that is, with justification but with the question 'Does God exist?'" But the leaders of this movement realize that the Church can, and frequently does, answer this question to its own satisfaction without impressing the non-believer. They want to get the Church out of the old rut of absorption in ecclesiastical matters into open encounter with the world where alone this question can be grappled with. But it cannot be tackled in isolation from other questions. The German economy is staggering to its feet, but nobody knows what spirit will animate it or what purposes it will pursue. In men's minds there are still the relics of the distorted historical, political, and social thinking on which the nation has been fed. The younger generation, and not only the young, call everything, even before it is heard, "propaganda".

This is not just the Church's excuse for its own failure to make contact. At the Conference which the Editor attended, it was not in the name of religion but in the name of science that the loss of trust in the search for truth was deplored. The desire to meet the need for a new valuation of knowledge leads the organizers to fill their courses not only with expositions of the Christian faith but with lectures on nationalism, secularism, science, somewhat on the model of University extension lectures. It also results in a great preponderance of lectures over discussion.

Some of the courses have had an immediate practical object and result. One highly successful one held recently at Hermannsburg drew together farmers and refugees from the region, between whom relations are far from easy. Many of the refugees are town dwellers who find country life and farm work irksome, and on the other hand (as researches at the Research Institute have shown) the farming community in Hanover is for the most part intensely conservative. Families have occupied the same farm in some cases for hundreds of years: they have intermarried within a small geographical area. They know nothing of the outside world and have little imagination about it, and on the other hand communicate between themselves with an economy of word and gesture which makes them exceedingly inarticulate. Plenty of stories, some well authenticated, circulate about the hardness of farmers and the indolence of refugees, and little enough is done to establish communication across the psychological barriers. In the Conference at the Hermannsburg Academy an opening address was delivered for the refugees by a man who, in his first two sentences, said that he did not want to speak to the farmers, he wanted to address his fellow refugees, and that the rest of his speech would be devoted to telling them how he felt they had failed to make the best of a difficult situation. When it came to the turn of the leading farmer to make his speech he tore up his prepared notes, which he said contained criticisms of the attitudes and behaviour of refugees, and in his turn addressed the farmers. This

created an atmosphere in which free and open discussion was possible and a new relationship was established.

The conference of journalists which the Editor of the Christian News-Letter attended had a membership of about sixty. Some were editors and journalists in the secular press, some in the religious press, others were occasional contributors.

It was not considered necessary that anybody should give a comprehensive picture of the actual position of the press in Germany to-day, and though this was known to a few people in the Conference it was by no means common knowledge. However in conversation a broad outline of the press position did appear. The acute paper shortage makes itself felt in the size and frequency of publication of journals rather than in the number of journals published. So-called "dailies" appear three times a week: their circulation is restricted to a given geographical area, and licences are withdrawn if the circulation falls below fifty thousand. On the other hand, the shortage of paper does not seem to affect the number of journals appearing, and Germany is full of mushroom growths of periodicals, good, bad and indifferent. The press reflects the divorce between politics and religion in Germany, which a few on both sides are trying to overcome. For the most part religious papers say little of politics and political papers nothing of religion. The small size of papers makes the choice of material very difficult, compelling the journalist to select and compress. This means that just at the time when Germany ought to be looking beyond her own boundaries again, many papers say very little about events outside Germany except international political events at the top level. The Amsterdam Assembly, for example, was scarcely mentioned in the German press, though this was not from any anti-religious bias, for the re-opening of Cologne Cathedral a week or two before was very adequately reported. Relations with the Press branch of the Control Commission were spoken of as happy, on the whole, though the granting of licences evoked some complaint. Licences are fairly freely given, but often to curious groups of people. For any one paper

one of the three or four licensees is usually a printer, but others may be business men or even small shopkeepers with a desire for power. Licensees do not usually own the papers, but they have power.

The periods for discussion in the Conference were brief and mainly devoted to general questions. An illuminating comment was made by one editor who said that in the general discussion they discussed in the main large general topics raised by the lecturers, while when they got together on their own in odd moments the conversation drifted to the present practical difficulties of journalism, without reference to the large topics raised in lectures. It is not only in Germany that that sort of integration is difficult to find!

The method of the Evangelical Academies is being watched with great care and not a little questioning by Christians in Germany who are most keenly aware how vital it is both for the Church and for Germany that the Church should discover how to speak to a post-war generation in terms that it can understand and in a way which will evoke trust. The kind of questions which thoughtful Christians are asking are: Can this method succeed? Is it trying to reach too many people? Does it possess the leaders that it needs, and, if not, ought it not to seek first to build up a small body of men and women knowledgeable in and committed to the work before it tries to draw in the thousands? How lasting is the effect on the casual attendant? And, most urgent of all, has the Church in its possession the message that is needed for Germany to-day?

On such questions it is not easy to comment from outside. The task is overwhelmingly difficult and the courage with which it is being tackled out of meagre resources deserves nothing but praise. The type of Christian who is quite sure he knows all the answers and talks his head off in a discussion is politely and very firmly kept away from Hermannsburg, but great difficulty is experienced in finding men capable of interpreting to German men and women their history and experience in such a way that they are not plunged from a mood of arrogant elation into one of self-deploring and uncreative despair, but find, from a right

acceptance of the whole of the past, the courage and wisdom to face the future. In trying to do this, the Church has to reckon with the poverty, even bankruptcy, of University thinking. Here and there can be found a man who has lived a life of encounter with the world—sometimes a man who joined the Nazi party in its early days and from a soul-racking experience has won a new faith. But, broadly speaking, neither the Universities nor the professional theologians have made a large enough response to life to be able to interpret experience for others.

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE AND THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION

We said in the last number of the Christian News-Letter that it was submitted in draft to a number of critics whose comments helped to shape the final form of the News-Letter. Here are two of the letters received, one from a member of the Lambeth Conference, the other from a scientist. The first is from the Bishop of Sheffield, who writes :—

" I think that you let off the theologians too lightly. Most of them are arguing with one another ; they are not within talking distance of the scientist. Far from giving the average ordinand and parson an understanding of the scientific approach to life and of scientific achievements, they almost encourage him to disrespect them, and to reach, as you so aptly put it, the ' but '—' part of nature *but* also spirit '—far too quickly and lightly.

" The scientist knows the solid truth and incomparable fruits of the hypothesis of uniformity, for example, too well to throw it away, or to give up as easily as the theologians expect him to his scepticism or agnosticism *re* the evidences for miracle. If theologically liberalism won't do, we must find an interpretation of the faith at least as sympathetic to science—and our theologians must come to personal grips with scientists and try to find a common speech."

The other letter comes from Cambridge, from Sir Lawrence Bragg. He writes :—

" Your letter has come at a bad time for me. I am on the eve of departure for America and desperately busy

making last-minute dispositions in the Laboratory. But you raise such intensely interesting questions that I must do my best to respond.

" Tizard's address is really a contribution to our understanding of the changes coming over the world due to what I think of as the ' Scientific and Technical Mutation ' which human society is undergoing. We are witnessing at present one of those upheavals due to man discovering a new way of living in the material sense. The last great one was agriculture—which started ' civilization ' by making it possible for man to live in settled communities. I suppose the one before that was the domestication of animals, giving him a reserve of animal food instead of having to depend on the chances of hunting. Far in the distant past—fire, enabling him to live in climates otherwise unsuited to him. This is all very trite, but I am thinking aloud. I want to emphasize the very profound belief that the last few hundred years mark the setting in of a sudden change in the whole of man's environment such as only happens every few thousand years. We are only at the beginning of it, but we must realize the magnitude of the change in order to understand our present troubles.

" Tizard's address turned on the point ' Be adaptable or perish '. We must show we have the virility and adaptability to be leaders under these new conditions.

" Each of these changes makes for a much richer and more complex society. It makes it possible for men to be much better—or much worse. Society is more highly organized, has a more complex nervous system, has vastly extended inter-relations. What each of us does now, does not only affect our tiny family group, tribe, village, or town, but sends ripples over the whole world.

" Our moral life is inextricably mixed up with our material life. The qualities and values remain the same, but the form of expression and the form of our ideas must change to meet the new circumstances.

" Now let me paint as black a picture as possible of what many feel to be the failure of the Church to respond to these new conditions.

" The Church funks this issue, by not trying to understand it. When it talks about a conflict between religion and science (which can of course only be a conflict if one or other is a false form of religion or science) it sets up a kind of Aunt Sally science which it then proceeds to knock down. The picture is that of science not believing in a soul because anatomy has not discovered its site, not believing in man as the son of God because his descent from the animals is so obvious, not believing in the supremacy of truth, beauty and goodness because they cannot be measured by a yardstick.

" The real conflict lies quite elsewhere—the Church's adherence to much dogma which is repulsive to the noblest thought of the present age.

" We are revolted by the lewd behaviour of the inhabitants of Olympus in the Greek mythology—and it seems to us no fit form of expression of our reverence to attribute such qualities to the Gods. Cannot the Church understand that the modern thinking man is equally revolted by something to which the Church still pays lip-service, evidence of the nature of Godhead by stories of a series of conjuring tricks played with the order of the universe ? It is not that science denies power to the Almighty, but that these seem utterly ignoble concepts, so unlike the beauty which is revealed to the humble student of nature. It scents the fake, and is revolted by it as a connoisseur.

" I am afraid you will think this very naïve, but I do firmly believe this is the main barrier between science and religion at the present time. It is a flimsy one, which honesty on both sides and free speech would easily destroy. Man is essentially religious, and longs for a faith, and the scientist is no exception. Christianity is part of the essence of our being in Western Europe. But we must be able to look up to our spiritual leaders, and not have this painful feeling that they are being blind or intellectually dishonest. Their doctrinal teaching savours so much of the very human failing of being unable to admit one could possibly have been wrong.

" Science is really deeply mystical in its outlook. It cannot but realize what a minute fraction of the whole truth it has been able to garner, even in its own field."

THE SUPPLEMENT

In the recent Debate on the Address in the House of Commons several of those who took part from both sides of the House made an explicit connection between what they had to say and their Christian faith. That is as it should be. A man's judgments in politics, as in everything else, are determined in the last resort by what he believes to matter most. That does not mean that the judgments of Christian men will necessarily agree. There are more things than one that matter to a Christian, and in any given circumstances it is always a question to which of these most weight should be assigned. There is also room for differences of view by what means an agreed end can best be achieved. The bond of unity is the common reference to the same ultimate standards.

But sometimes this appeal to Christian standards is too simple and direct to fit the complexities of politics. When Mr. Ivor Thomas, for example, maintained in the Debate that, whereas Christianity says, " What is mine is thine," members of the present Government say, " What is thine is mine," he was both attempting to apply to the relativities of politics a Christian counsel of perfection, which no political party accepts as its guiding principle, and at the same time unduly simplifying the issues in dispute in regard to the nationalization of industries. But that there is a fundamental connection between Christian belief and political decision, and that it is the duty of Christians unceasingly to seek for it, cannot be doubted by those who believe that Christ opened to mankind a new quality of living. It is the real world, the actual life of society, the political ordering of men's relations with one another, that have to be permeated by the transforming power of the new life.

It is for this reason that the publication of a pamphlet by the Parliamentary Socialist Christian Group explaining why the fact that they are Christians makes them Socialists

in politics seemed to us significant. We invited Mr. Christopher Hollis, Conservative Member of Parliament for Devizes, to initiate a discussion of the far-reaching questions directly or indirectly raised by this publication, (C.N-L. No. 318.) In this issue we publish a reply by Major Woodrow Wyatt, Member of Parliament for the Aston Division of Birmingham. He is a young barrister, a member of the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Socialist Christian Group, and one of the seventy-seven signatories of its pamphlet. He was a member of the Cabinet Mission to India. Believing a right understanding of the relation of Christianity to politics to be of the highest importance at the present time, we propose to carry on the debate in the Christian News-Letter and to invite others to participate.

CANON A. R. VIDLER

It is with the greatest pleasure that we are able to tell our readers that the work of the C.N-L. and the Christian Frontier, which has been carried on with some difficulty during the autumn because of acute shortage of staff, is to be reinforced from the beginning of the New Year. Canon A. R. Vidler is leaving the office of Warden of St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, for a Canonry at Windsor. This change will bring him near to London and also give him a margin of time, which he is generously devoting to the work at 20, Balcombe Street. We need hardly say that no help could be more welcome. Canon Vidler shared in the founding of the News-Letter, was its Assistant Editor in the early months, and, while the News-Letter was at Oxford for half the war, regularly travelled from Hawarden for meetings of the Editorial Board. He edited the two series of C.N-L. books which did so much to make the News-Letter known.

Kathleen Bliss

"IN THIS FAITH WE LIVE"

A Further Comment

BY WOODROW L. WYATT

In his comments on '*In This Faith We Live*' Mr. Hollis is his usual fair-minded and cultured self. He writes with authority, insight and knowledge and his remarks demand a far more learned reply than any that I can hope to give. It is with a deep sense of inadequacy that I venture on the task at all. Nor is it made any easier by the fact that Mr. Hollis seeks not to quarrel but to assist—there are no hard, sharp and readily controvertible statements to attack.

From the first I must make it clear that I am in no way the spokesman of the many Labour M.P.s who signed the pamphlet. I was not one of its principal authors but am merely a member of the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Socialist Christian Group, which meets regularly at the House of Commons. Naturally I subscribe to the pamphlet's fundamental position and attended the meetings of the Group at which it was discussed, but I would not have been capable of the clear formulation of even a part of it.

So what I write is from the standpoint of an individual Socialist who deems himself to be a Christian, but not a particularly doctrinaire one. I accept the teachings of the Church of England but do not, because of that, believe every other Church to be without merit, nor, necessarily, to have departed from the true doctrine of Christianity. The driving force of Christianity is too all-embracing to admit only one interpretation, too comprehensive to be dispensed from only one source. Consequently, I cannot feel that there is any real point in Mr. Hollis' criticism "one cannot but note that the Church—in any definition of the word 'Church'—plays no positive part at all in this pamphlet's statement of faith". Our pamphlet was not written on an ecclesiastical level: it clearly could not be. There was no attempt to discuss, say, the nature of Sacraments, because it was not

relevant to the job in hand. That job was the attempt to explain the part that the principles of Christianity should have in shaping political action; and why a group of Socialist M.P.s believed they could best apply their Christian beliefs in practical fashion through the Labour Party. Of course, we believe it to be the duty of every Christian to preach the doctrine of his Church but it was impossible, in such a pamphlet, to preach all the doctrine of all the Churches at the same time. The attempt would have been ridiculous and the result barren. All we could do was to get a statement on the general level of Christian belief and apply that to the economic and political problems of a democracy. We were not concerned with the Church as such but with the purpose of life, from a Christian viewpoint, and how it could best be achieved.

It is Mr. Hollis' second criticism which goes to the root of the matter. We wrote, " The basic aims, then, of Christian policy, and the aims which should be common to all Christian citizens in any political party, are, first, the extension to every individual of an effective opportunity to share in the task of government, and, secondly, to get for each the highest possible minimum of wealth, security against hardship, a considerable allowance of leisure time, and educational opportunity sufficient to make possible the rich and truly recreative enjoyment of leisure ".

Mr. Hollis criticizes the use of the phrase, " highest possible minimum of wealth, security against hardship ". He claims that Christianity is essentially an ascetical religion, that " *lowest* possible minimum of wealth " would have been more in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel. This is a difficult criticism to answer, except when one remembers that the use of terms such as " wealth " and " poverty " is a relative one. We were anxious to stress throughout the pamphlet that material things could not be an end in themselves, that they were only of value when used as a means to climb to a freer and fuller life of spiritual awareness. The evil of riches is the love of them for themselves, not their mere possession. That, surely, was the sense in which they were condemned in the Gospels. The

man who is rich is usually rich by comparison with his fellows. The rich man of ancient Palestine would not ride in a train, go to a cinema, read the *Daily Express* or listen to Tommy Handley. An unemployed person of to-day would not exchange lots with him. Yet his riches then gave him power over his contemporaries and the temptation to use that power. They placed him in the position of envy and gave him a superior position. He liked the superior position for its own sake and not for the good he could do in it. That was why he was condemned. The poor were free from such dangerous temptations, such inducements to usurp the power of God. Consequently, they were better placed for being good. But that did not mean that merely by being poor they became good. The burdens they had to bear had to be voluntarily accepted, even if they were unavoidable, to be of value. They had to become aware of their own spiritual nature to profit by it. They had to have leisure to contemplate spiritual things.

The Christian doctrine of creation is that all things were created for man's use. Major heresies such as Gnosticism and Dualism have sought to over-emphasize asceticism. Comfortable rulers misused the ascetic element of Christianity to persuade the poor to remain contented in oppression and starvation. It is not God's doing, as Mr. Hollis suggests, that the world is as it is, but man's. Our contention is that if man is to ponder his nature and his duty to God he must have the free opportunity to do so. If the highest possible minimum wealth were secured to all then there would be no rich and no poor in the normal material sense. All would have equal opportunity to follow their vocation and to see that God's will was done, and not man's. Whether all would take advantage of their opportunity is another, and more doubtful, matter. That is why we were so anxious to stress that the securing of material possessions is the beginning of man's struggle, not the end.

It cannot be denied that Christians were commanded to succour the poor and help the distressed. To eliminate poverty is to carry the command to its logical conclusion. Are we to believe that poverty is a virtue in itself? I venture

to suggest that " For ye have the poor with you always " was an expression of sorrow, not of the fitness of things. Certainly, Christ prophesied insecurity, but He did not say it was a satisfactory state of affairs. Man's task is to evolve towards God and to prepare himself for the next life. It is difficult to know how he can do it if his growth is so retarded in this life that there is no development, if he is so oppressed with his physical burdens and deficiencies that there is no thought. Professor Jung, on whose writings Mr. Hollis places much reliance, has convincingly demonstrated that man only progresses when the possibility of spiritual development is present. It is not present unless there is space for free expression. Hence our insistence on the highest possible minimum of wealth—in other words, the extinction of poverty and the removal of the distinction between rich and poor, in which distinction lies the harm.

We do not suppose that such an elimination of poverty would herald the millenium, nor would it obviate the need for personal sacrifice. But all the sacrifices are not monetary and all requirements are not equal. We do not even advocate an egalitarian society—only the creation of a state of affairs in which all may pursue the vocation to which they are fitted unhampered by financial limitations. It is because the Labour Party aims at broadly this sort of society that we believe it to have a good claim to be considered the Christian party. It is the party which most deliberately strives for full economic, as well as political, liberty so that individual man may exercise his own choice and not dance to the wishes of others. In effect, so that God's will may be done, if man so wishes.

To fulfil this two-fold drive—born of compassion and the desire to allow men to be free—much organization of a nation's resources is necessary. In the performance of this task there is great danger that impersonal and remote control may triumph at the expense of humanity. The means may come to be glorified instead of the end. Therefore it is the duty of the Socialist Christian continually to remind his fellow party members that the aim of Socialism is to liberate man, not to enslave him. If technicians,

managers, Coal Boards, the State, are set up as overseers instead of as servants we shall be no better off than we were under Capitalism. It is this leavening of the materialist concept that our pamphlet aimed in a small way to provide.

A Christian will not expect to be redeemed in Socialism but in Christ. Attempts to provide Social Security for all are stepping stones to the proper expression of individual responsibility not to the evasion of it. They are aimed at achieving a balance between the spiritual and the material which will permit further progress. In some ways they make the task of the Christian harder rather than easier. He no longer has the excuse that the forced preoccupation with earthly things has prevented him from looking upwards.

All Socialists are broadly agreed on the physical groundwork required. It is the supreme obligation of the Christian Socialist to ensure that the physical groundwork is not elevated to the status of an idol but is merely regarded as an essential means for obtaining a fuller and more Christian life. The organization is not undertaken for the sake of organization, but because it cannot be avoided if injustice and tyranny are to be swept away. If Mr. Hollis prefers it, we desire to make all men poor, not rich—in the sense that the possession of riches becomes of no special importance—so that they may be in a position to realize that none are superior to their fellows in the sight of God. But the aim is more conveniently expressed in terms of richness—for if the resources of the world Divinely created become equally available to all, who is poor? Only he who, even in those circumstances, steadfastly refuses to use his opportunity to obtain a richer spiritual life.

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